

# Risk evaluation and management of work-related stress in the refuse collection sector

COMMENDED

Prevention Centre of Occupational Risk (KE.P.E.K.) of Central Greece and Municipality of Chalkida, Greece <sup>(1)</sup>

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## The issue

The management team dealing with refuse collection in the municipality of Chalkida realised that there were certain challenges when it comes to working conditions, such as irregular shift work. In addition, concerns were raised about issues such as role ambiguity and poor overall communication. It emerged that employees were sometimes unsure of their obligations and duties, and active participation in decision making was not always facilitated. Consequently, good work practices were put at risk in certain circumstances, leading to increases in the number of accidents and cases of absenteeism and sick leave. When the problem of presenteeism and work-related stress first appeared, it became clear to management that change was needed.

## Action taken

Preventive interventions were oriented towards collective solutions and encouraged active participation from all workers and managers. Using a systematic approach, the foundations were laid for the creation of a working environment based on confidence, collaboration, comprehension and support in which employees and management actively participate to improve working conditions.

The first focus was addressing organisational deficiencies. Changes in work organisation were implemented through work scheduling, distribution of work according to legislation, work contracts and employees' needs. Employees' duties and obligations were clarified and their participation in decision making was promoted.

Ergonomic planning of work practices was brought on board by minimising exposure to extreme temperatures and creating teams of refuse collectors based on their level of experience. Global positioning systems were installed in refuse vehicles to enable communication during emergencies and older vehicles were replaced. In addition, changes were made to the health and safety policy. These aimed to enforce social and interpersonal relationships, give workers the opportunity to express their concerns and improve the training system.

At an individual level, the introduction of the employee assistance programme allowed workers to acquire the necessary competencies and skills to recognise and tackle problematic situations. This helped reinforce the employee's ability to prevent stress through changes in his or her approach and behaviour.

<sup>(1)</sup> This project was realised through the efforts of its steering group, whose members were Toukas Dimitrios (Occupational Health and Safety Inspector) and Delichas Miltiadis (Occupational Health and Safety Inspector) from the Prevention Centre of Occupational Risk (KE.P.E.K.) of Central Greece; and Metaxas Nikolaos (Safety Consultant), Simitzis Athanasios (Occupational Physician), Vrakas Alexandros (Head of Refuse Collection Department Administration), Basoukos Alexandros (Health and Safety Representative of Employees), Boulougouras Vasilios (Health and Safety Representative of Employees), Athanasopoulos Athanasios (Health and Safety Representative of Employees) and Tsokou Froso (Health and Safety Representative of Employees) from the Municipality of Chalkida.



## Results achieved

- A reduction in the overall risk of work-related stress from 'medium' to 'low'.
- A reduction in the number of accidents due to human errors.
- Reductions in the number of cases of absenteeism, sickness absence and medical emergencies.
- Increased awareness and responsibility among employees and administration on issues related to stress.
- Active participation from employees in tackling work-related stress.



*The foundations were laid for the creation of a working environment based on confidence, collaboration, comprehension and support.*